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Raising the Bard: Bringing Shakespeare to today



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IN FOCUS

Omoide yokocho,
a step back in time,
by Daniel Tang.



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JANUARY 2016

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TO-DO LIST

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DEC 30 KEIJI HAINO

Haino is a giant towering over Japan's underground music scene. And he sure looks the part, dressed at all times in his trademark black attire, like a gothic Willy Wonka. His cult status has grown exponentially over the years, matched by his prolific output that includes his highly acclaimed 2012 collaboration with Jim O'Rourke and Oren Ambarchi on *Imikuzushi*. So expect the unexpected for his solo show at Show Boat in his bohemian stomping ground of Koenji. When it comes to a Haino show, you can never predict what will be in store, and that's part of the fun. Haino frequently switches genres at will, from sorcery drone noise to mournful ballad with the casual snap of a finger. His upcoming gig will likely last between four and five hours, and rumor has it the musician is going to deploy a wide range of instruments, from synthesizers to hurdy-gurdies. **Dec 30, 7:30pm, ¥3,500 (adv)/ ¥4,000 (door).** Show Boat. Koenji. Tel: 03-3337-5745. <http://showboat1993.wix.com/showboat1993>



DEC 31 EDITOR'S PICK WOMB COUNTDOWN 2016

Venerable Shibuya dance palace Womb hosts a countdown for the ages this New Year's Eve. Headlining the big event is Mathew Jonson, one of the most dependably creative trackmakers and DJs around. The son of a sound engineer and impresario of the Wagon Repair label, the Canadian musician weaves original compositions into pulsing symphonies of techno. He's been a favorite of crowds in Japan, from the legendary Yellow to the highly-rated Labyrinth festival. Backing Jonson in the DJ pulpit is Mike Shanon, who heads the Cynosure imprint out of Berlin. Shanon has helped introduce our ears to artists such as Akufen, Deadbeat, and Ernesto Ferrerya, and is known for crafting singles and remixes that land squarely on the charts. **Dec 31, 9pm, ¥4,000-5,000. Womb.** Shibuya. Tel: 03-5459-0039. <http://meturl.com/wombcountdown2016> *Dan Grunebaum*



JAN 1 FIRST SUNRISE AT TOKYO SKYTREE

One New Year's tradition unique to Japanese culture is the ritual of *hatsumode*: a visit to the shrine to pay respect for the first days of January. The practice is believed to bring good luck in the New Year. The same goes for the *hatsuhinode*, or the first sunrise. Viewing this first dawn is a popular way to usher in a new year. This New Year's Day, Skytree will open its doors for visitors to admire the first sunrise of the year (predicted to occur at around 6:45am) from the 350-meter-high deck of Japan's tallest tower. A limited number of tickets are available through Tobu Top Tours, so if you'd like to take in the inspiring view, we recommended booking your tickets early. **Jan 1, 5-8am, ¥13,800 (comes with buffet breakfast at the nearby Dai-Ichi Hotel Ryogoku).** Tokyo Skytree. Tokyo Skytree. Tel: 03-3621-0651. <http://meturl.com/sunrise2016>



JAN 6-MAR 6 ICE RINK IN TOKYO MIDTOWN

As the new year gets underway, the largest outdoor skating rink in the city opens for the midwinter season in Tokyo Midtown's spacious garden. As the nightfall sets in, the skate rink is set aglow by beautiful wintry lighting, making it a wondrous setting of amusement for children, as well as an ideal romantic spot for a night out on the town. The rink was first set up in 2010, and since then has grown in popularity year after year. In 2014, more than 35,000 Tokyoites took to the ice at Midtown for wintry fun! There's even an area rinkside to rest in if you need a break from skating. The facility can hold up to 200 skaters at once and is open to the public until 10pm nightly. **Jan 6-March 6, 11am-10pm, ¥1,500. Tokyo Midtown.** Roppongi. Tel: 03-3475-3100. www.tokyo-midtown.com/en



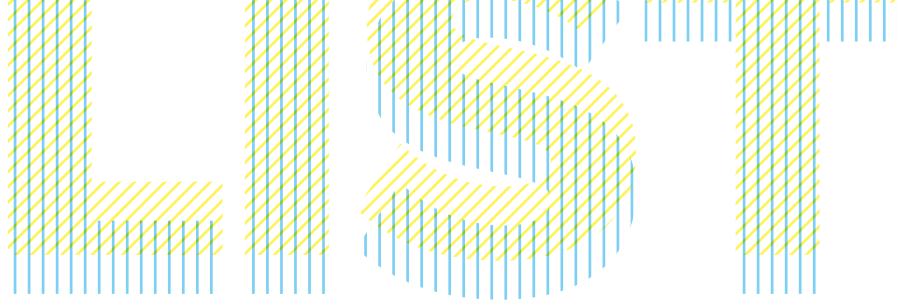
JAN 10-24 GRAND SUMO TOURNAMENT

January brings another "Hatsu Bashi", the first Grand Sumo Tournament of the year. The most Zen-like wrestling sport—each bout lasts mere seconds—sumo's first organized tournament in its current form began back in 1684. In recent years, the world of sumo has seen an influx of foreign-born wrestlers, mostly from Mongolia and Eastern Europe. The three reigning *yokozunas*, the highest ranked *rikishis*, all hail from Mongolia. The indisputable star of sumo is Hakuho Sho—born Mönkhbatyn Davaajargal—with a record-breaking 35 championships to his name. Witnessing the bouts at the famed Ryogoku Sumo Hall is one of the essential to-dos for the tourists and longtime residents of Tokyo alike. **Jan 10-24, ¥2,200-14,800. Ryogoku Kokugikan.** Ryogoku. Tel: 03-3623-5111. www.sumo.or.jp/en/index



JAN 13 JAMIE XX

In Color, the solo debut by the 27-year-old British producer/DJ Jamie xx—the brain behind the influential Mercury Prize-winning band The xx—is a top contender for album of the year. Despite its moody and complex soundscapes, the album is immensely listenable and danceable. Known for his eclectic sound that goes well beyond the boundaries of electronica, Jamie xx possesses a musical talent of extraordinary breadth, on par with his compatriots like James Blake and FKA Twigs of the UK's dubstep scene. If his Akasaka Blitz appearance on January 13 doesn't help to blast your midwinter blues, well, nothing will. Highly recommended. **Jan 13, 7:30pm, ¥5,500 (adv).** Akasaka Blitz. Akasaka. Tel: 03-3584-8811. <http://meturl.com/jamiexx2016>



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JAN 1 THE EMPEROR'S CUP FINAL

Even after the end to the J-League season, Japanese soccer doesn't end until the first day of the calendar year. New Year's Day is the holiest day for Japanese fans of the beautiful sport. That's when the prestigious Emperor's Cup Final traditionally takes place—an annual tournament dating all the way back to 1921. Participated in by everyone from regional amateur teams to the top division J1 clubs, the event decides once and for all which is the “best soccer team in Japan.” Eight teams, including the current title holder, Gamba Osaka, and Massimo Ficcadenti's capital side FC Tokyo (pictured), have survived so far to fight for a berth in the cup final at Ajinomoto Stadium. Whoever emerges victorious, the final is sure to be a dramatic climax. **Jan 1, 2:15pm, ¥3,100-6,200 (adv)/ ¥3,600-7,200 (door).** Ajinomoto Stadium. 地下鉄 Tobitakyu. www.jfa.jp/eng/match/emperorscup_2015



Photo: Nigel Young, Foster + Partners

JAN 1-FEB 14 FOSTER + PARTNERS

Norman Foster is the quintessential architect of postmodernism. The HSBC Main Building, Foster's state-of-the-art monolithic high-rise constructed in 1985, became the symbol of Hong Kong's ascendancy as one of Asia's key financial hubs. With this hi-tech structure of steel and glass, “Foster effectively reinvented the skyscraper as a type,” observed design critic Deyan Sudjic. Since then, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect has built up a portfolio of innovative architecture, numbering well over 300 projects across continents. One of these is The Gherkin (pictured), a futuristic glass façade built ten years ago that today hugs London's skyline, becoming no less than the face of the UK's capital. This is the first comprehensive exhibition in Japan on the foremost architectural firm of innovative urbanism. **Jan 1-Feb 14, 10am-10pm, ¥1,800.** Mori Art Museum. 地下鉄 Roppongi. Tel: 03-5777-8600. <http://meturl.com/fosterpartners>



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JAN 2-MAR 4 MITAIKEN ZONE FILM FESTIVAL

The notorious Mitaiken film festival gathers a diverse selection of undistributed movies of bizarre and eccentric tastes from all over the world. The slate consists of a wide range of genres: everything from B-movies to horror flicks to auteur cinema. Highlights of this year's lineup—which will see 50 films screened—include *Heist*, a thriller starring Robert DeNiro and Kate Bosworth; *A Band Called Death*, a rockumentary on Detroit's legendary African-American proto-punk band; and Texan filmmaker David Gordon Green's indie drama *Joe* (pictured), which features Nicholas Cage in the title role. Each film will be screened for a limited run of seven days at Human Trust Cinema in Shibuya. **Jan 2-March 4, various times, ¥1,300.** Human Trust Cinema Shibuya. 地下鉄 Shibuya. Tel: 03-5468-5551. <http://aoyama-theater.jp/feature/mitaiken2016>



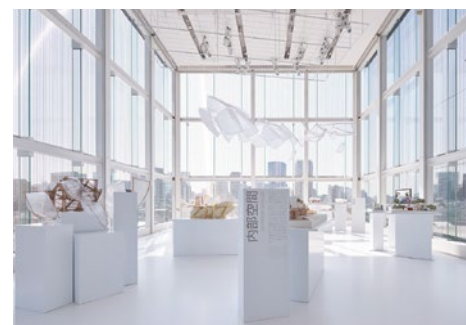
JAN 13 BO NINGEN

Self-styled “enlightenment activists from far east psychedelic underground,” Bo Ningen are all Japanese, but came together and are based in London. The quartet first formed after bassist/vocalist Taigen Kawabe and guitarist Kohhei Matsuda met in 2006, and later added guitarist Yuki Tsujii and drummer Monchan Monna. Bon Ningen follows in the tradition of Japanese psychedelic groups like Yura Yura Teikoku, and have cultivated a reputation for unbridled outings of retro guitar fuzz. They tour Japan this winter for the first time in over a year. **Jan 13, 7:30pm, ¥3,000.** WWW Shibuya. 地下鉄 Shibuya. Tel: 03-5458-7685. <http://meturl.com/bonining2016> D.G.



JAN 20-21 LOU DOILLON

Like her mother—the British icon Jane Birkin—Lou Doillon wears many shoes and excels at them all. She's a successful model, actress, and singer, who is the embodiment of French femininity. Mlle Doillon's impressive 2013 debut as a chanteuse, *Places*, deservingly won her Victoires de la Musique, followed by the release of her second album *Lay Low* earlier this year. There's possibly no better venue in the whole of Tokyo than the intimate setting of the Blue Note to get acquainted with her sultry voice, as heard on her breakout single, “ICU.” **Jan 20-21, 8pm, ¥8,800.** Blue Note Tokyo. 地下鉄 Omotensando. Tel: 03-5485-0088. www.bluenote.co.jp/jp/artists/lou-doillon



© Louis Vuitton / Yasuhiro Takagi

UNTIL JAN 31 FRANK GEHRY

Running concurrently with his large-scale retrospective at Roppongi's 21_21, this exhibition promises a more intimate look at the work of visionary architect Frank Gehry, focusing on the Canadian-American's much-talked-about new museum project in Paris: the Fondation Louis Vuitton. A \$143 million complex housing contemporary art—its intricate shape resembling a mass of icebergs—was commissioned by Bernard Arnault, president and CEO of the LVMH group. The show traces Gehry's creative process step-by-step, from the initial conception to implementation. **Until Jan 31, 12-8pm, free.** Espace Louis Vuitton Tokyo. 地下鉄 Omotesando. Tel: 03-5766-1094. www.espacelouisvuittontokyo.com

TO CATCH A THIEF

Black Mass director Scott Cooper spills the gangster beans

BY KEVIN MCGUE

After two hours of being poked and prodded in the makeup chair, Johnny Depp appears on set.

The 52-year-old has been physically transformed by Oscar-winning makeup designer Joel Harlow, who replaces Depp's signature messy locks and dark eyes with a gray, receding hairline and steely blue stare. Director Scott Cooper calls "Action!" and Depp completes the transformation. The actor, who's made a career of playing whimsical characters from '50s B-movie director Ed Wood to the Mad Hatter, becomes pure evil.

The only other performer in the scene is Julianne Nicholson, who is known for playing prime characters on TV shows such as *Boardwalk Empire* and *Masters of Sex*. She opens the door of the suburban bedroom set and delivers a line about not feeling well enough to join the men downstairs. "Let's see what you got," Depp says, running his hand over her face to check for fever as she cowers. Next is a check for swollen glands, as his hand encircles her throat and tears well up in her eyes. He looks her up and down, shakes his head, and departs, leaving the woman utterly destroyed.

The film is *Black Mass*, the set is most



assuredly a real location in Boston rather than a Hollywood soundstage, and Depp is James "Whitey" Bulger, whose ruthless rise in the Boston underworld landed him an honored spot on the FBI's most-wanted list. In a story full of brutal violence, the bedroom encounter is one of the most devastating scenes, thanks to Depp's icy performance.

Witnessing that transformation was "absolutely mesmerizing," director Scott Cooper tells *Metropolis* by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "Both as a director and a fan of his work, it was amazing to watch. Johnny is so kind, sweet,

and soulful, and what you see on the screen couldn't be further from that. It was not only physical, but an emotional and psychological transition, the likes of which I have rarely seen."

The director calls the brief bedroom scene "a masterclass of subtlety in acting, in psychological violence."

Bulger's criminal rise seems made for the movies. As one of his henchmen says in the film, "in the beginning, Jim was a small time player ... and the next thing you know, he was a goddamn kingpin. You know why? Because the FBI let it happen." An investigation by *Boston Globe*



reporters Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill found that not only was Bulger's rampage across the city known to his politician brother, but was also being covered up by corrupt agents in the Bureau.

Despite the drama inherent in the true story, the project went through a development period nearly as complicated as the FBI's efforts to nab Bulger. Depp left after a salary dispute and returned only after Cooper replaced Barry Levinson as director. Cooper explains that he was able to stick it out through the long process because "it is a very compelling narrative about a man who is the most powerful politician in the city of Boston, while his brother is the most notorious gangster, and then you throw in a childhood friend who is in the FBI. I said, 'I just can't pass this up,' and I started to do a lot of research."

The politician brother is played by Brit Benedict Cumberbatch, and the FBI agent role is filled by Aussie Joel Edgerton, both of whom do an admirable job of inhabiting the Boston accent. The rest of the stellar cast is rounded out by Kevin Bacon, Dakota Johnson, and Peter Sarsgaard. "It's really an embarrassment of riches," Cooper laughs.

It's no surprise that he was able to assemble a roster of such fine performers. His first feature, *Crazy Heart*, netted Jeff Bridges the Oscar for Best Actor in 2010 and gained Cooper a

reputation as "an actor's director." That's not to say the director was after big names to put on the poster—he's interested in the performances and the actor's human qualities. In casting Dakota Johnson as Bulger's common-law wife, he didn't even consider the fact that her starring role in *50 Fifty Shades of Grey* would soon make her a household name, but was attracted by what he calls "a certain tenderness, which would bring some tenderness out of Bulger."

Although Depp has lately been quoted as saying, "I don't want one of those things," his performance has generated a good deal of speculation that his turn will net him his first Oscar, following three nominations.

"Award season is always a mystery to me," Cooper says, adding that "there are easier ways to make movies that might appeal to Oscar than seeing the world's biggest star strangle an 18-year-old woman." Depp also broke his own rule of not watching his completed films by sitting next to Cooper when the film premiered at the Venice Film Festival.

Another character in the film is its South Boston location, affectionately called "Southie," which Cooper says plays a role as important as those played by Depp and Cumberbatch.

"I would never shoot a movie set in Boston in Toronto or Atlanta," Cooper says of increasingly common practice of Hollywood productions going to where they can get tax breaks, regardless of what the story

demands. Despite filming around the actual stomping grounds of Bulger and the Winter Hill Gang, some work still had to be done. "Boston is very gentrified now," Cooper explains. "We had to recreate it."

The period of the film, which spans the '70s to mid-'80s, is another key element. Just don't expect the disco gowns and huge sunglasses of recent period films like *American Hustle*. "I think too often it is done too showy, and it is a very difficult period to do," Cooper explains. "My edict to all my department heads was, 'Let's approach this as if we were doing a contemporary film that just happens to be set in 1975.' All of those details should recede to the background, and you have to have collaborators with no ego to do that, because they naturally want to show off their work. But otherwise, you overshadow character."

Cooper expresses some reservations about dealing with a gangster story, saying, "Fair or not, when you make a film in this genre, you inevitably get compared to the best films ever made: Coppola, Scorsese..." Again, character takes precedent over all else. "I didn't set out to make a film about criminals who just happened to be human," Cooper says. "I wanted to make a film about humans who happened to be criminals."

However, the director does appreciate the power of the gangster figure in cinema. "People can escape the doldrums of their lives, and see the lives of these men, which were dangerous," he says, pointing to the gangster films of the 1930s cranked out by Warner Bros., which is also distributing *Black Mass*. "During the Great Depression, they really stuck it to the government, and people could relate to that."

Now 86, the real Whitey Bulger is safely behind bars. Would Cooper prefer that he had never been caught so he could leave his film open-ended?

"As the director of a film about him, I can say I'm happy I don't have to look over my shoulder every day to see if Whitey is there," the director says with a laugh.

***Black Mass* (Japanese title: *Black Scandal*) opens nationwide Jan 30.**



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SHAKE SHACK

The U.S. burger chain comes to Tokyo

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY THOMAS BEECHER

Nestled among the cozy ginkgo tree-lined Ichō Namiki Avenue in Meiji Jingu Gaien, the new Shake Shack makes for a pretty scene.

There's been a lot of buzz around last November's opening of this popular U.S. burger chain, which started 15 years ago as a hot dog cart in New York City. Having never tried the fabled fast food, I thought I would check it out.

Even in the brisk weather, patrons seemed content dining al fresco on the large front patio. People were eating, and there were lots of smiles. I felt optimistic ... that was, until I saw the 65-yard queue that separated me from my sandwich. It seemed I wasn't the only one to clue in to the buzz, and the line attendant informed me that I should anticipate an hour-and-a-half wait. Granted, it was a Saturday afternoon on a nice day. But an hour and half for a burger? Not today.

My second attempt was slightly more favorable. It was a Monday afternoon, and now, with the queue reduced by around 25 percent, the elusive burger seemed more within my reach. In the end, I waited just under one hour.

You might be asking yourself—as I did numerous times standing in the cool December air waiting for a hamburger—whether all of this is worth it. And the simple answer is “yes”; Shake Shack is a revelation in fast-food dining.

In a world where hamburgers have evolved into artworks of bewildering gourmet complex-



ity, Shake Shack, which opened its first official restaurant in Madison Square Park, New York, in 2004, provides a simple and tasty alternative. The chain describes itself as a modern-day “roadside” burger stand, and offers an extensive selection of comfort-food favorites like burgers and hot dogs, as well as a range of signature—and delicious—custard shakes and a house-label craft beer.

You won't find any kale-infused chickpea patties at Shake Shack. What you'll find are tried-and-true classics like the ShackBurger (¥680-980), a single or double 100-percent Angus beef cheeseburger with lettuce and tomato, and not much else. Alternatively,

you can step it up with the SmokeShack (¥880-1,180), adding all-natural applewood-smoked bacon.

The menu also includes the signature Shack-cago Dog (¥580), a Chicago-inspired hot dog with nine toppings. The Crinkle Cut Fries (¥280-600) are also noteworthy; although they look like those much-loathed frozen fries in giant packets at the supermarket, they're amazingly crisp and tasty and—for those looking to go all out—come generously smothered with molten cheese. Vegetarians are also well-catered to at Shake Shack with the 'ShroomBurger (¥930), which substitutes the meat patty with a crisp-fried Portobello mushroom.

Shake Shack has evolved over the years into a fast-food phenomenon with stores popping up all over the world, including locations in Russia and Saudi Arabia. Amazingly, the Tokyo restaurant is the first Shake Shack to open in East Asia.

The Tokyo restaurant models itself on the flagship Madison Square Park branch, which is so popular that a 24-hour webcam was installed to monitor wait times via live streaming over the company's website. According to Randy Garutti, Shake Shack CEO, the Meiji Jingu Gaien location came after a determined hunt for the perfect spot in Tokyo.

“The original Shack in New York City's Madison Square Park created a place for New Yorkers and visitors alike to gather as a community. We've searched far and wide, and we've found that same feeling again in Meiji Jingu Gaien,” said Garutti in a statement.

Shake Shack Tokyo is certainly something to be optimistic about. In a city like Tokyo, where burgers are undergoing their golden age, the franchise is a worthy contender for the top spot, and I wouldn't be surprised if other locations pop up in the coming months and years. All they need now is a webcam.

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INTERVIEW



RIEKO SUZUKI

The cooking guru and author on her recipe for creativity

BY MUBITA MAMBWE

While *Metropolis* readers know her for her fun and easy recipes, Rieko Suzuki has cultivated a following in Japan with her series of cookbooks that introduce readers to trendy and casual cuisine that can be made easily in a Japanese kitchen. Suzuki's recipes draw inspiration from her years traveling to various countries and being exposed to a wide range of food and cultures. *Metropolis* gets to know the person behind the recipes.

When did you start cooking?

I started cooking from as young as I can remember. My mom is a good cook, and she likes to make homemade dishes for everything.

What kind of food did you grow up eating?

My family's unusual in a sense; we're very curious about new foods. When I was very young, avocados weren't that popular. You wouldn't see them in a regular market, but my mom would go somewhere and get them. In the beginning, horseradish wasn't popular. When I was young, I remember I was on the train, going somewhere like Kinokuniya, and got fresh ones because my mother liked it with steak. We're hunters.

When did you decide to make cooking a career?

It's not my decision. When I got married, I went to Singapore, Jakarta, came back here, then went to L.A. In L.A., instead of getting school lunches, my daughters wanted to bring packed lunches. But they didn't like the taste of American bread, so I started baking at home. Some moms were interested in how those breads were made with

tofu or soy products, because they never heard of it. So I started teaching them how to make it, and that's the start.

You often cook with *okara* (soy pulp). What about it do you like?

It's not just *okara*. My main interest is using Japanese ingredients to make Western or Southeast Asian food, or using Western ingredients to adapt to Japanese foods. I want to make the ingredients world borderless. When you try to be a little more creative, you can substitute many local foods.

What did you learn about food from traveling?

There's a saying, "You are what you eat." That is really true. People who grew up with homemade cooking—doesn't matter if it's excellent or bad—they feel more attached to their country, their culture. Food is so strongly connected to your roots. That's what I found.

What about home cooking makes it so special?

Home cooking is not only the taste. It's the warmth from people you eat with, the smell of your dining room, the noise from the kitchen. Home cooking is special because someone made that food for you, and it's customized. Restaurants make good food, but they serve the same food to every customer. But home cooking is somebody thinking about you; there's a more personal connection. I think that makes people happier.

Why do you think food is so culturally important?

Because eating is very innate. Eating with somebody is sharing that.

Anything you'd like to tell our readers?

Just be creative. To me, cooking has never been a chore. It's more like drawing, making sculptures, or singing. That's why all these years, I've been enjoying and never got bored of it. Just grab ingredients from the market and try to make your art piece. Maybe it will taste good, maybe it won't, but still, play with it. Maybe something's going to click, and you might become the next Paul Bocuse.



RECIPE

KUROMAME-NI

RECIPE AND PHOTO BY RIEKO SUZUKI

It's already that time of year to prepare for the New Year's celebrations. Making *osechi*, Japanese set meals prepared and eaten at the start of the year, used to be the norm, but isn't often practiced these days even by Japanese people. However, making a few of the dishes at home adds a touch of magic. This *kuromame* ("black bean") recipe is simple and delicious, and does not require a high-pressure pot or special gadgetry. You can also adjust the sweetness to your liking.

INGREDIENTS

- 120g dried black beans
- 400cc water
- 60g sugar
- 2 tsp soy sauce
- 1 pinch salt
- 1/3 tsp baking soda
- 1 pot full of water, to soak beans in overnight

DIRECTIONS

1. Boil a pot of water. Add black beans and let soak overnight, with lid on.
2. Filter the water out of the pot. Add all other ingredients and heat to boil.
3. Turn off the heat after boiling for 5 min, and leave for 30 min. Repeat process about four times, until black beans get soft and sweet. Use as heavy or thick a pot as possible. You can leave black beans in for longer than 30 min if you need to step away from the kitchen, but make sure the heat is off! And come back to cooking before the beans get cold.

Rieko Suzuki

Rieko blogs bilingual recipes at <http://meturl.com/ruby>



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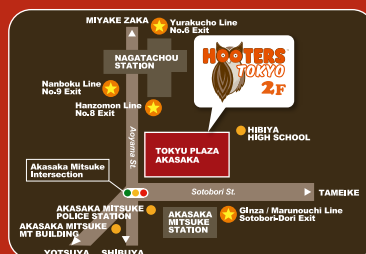
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WINTER IN ODAIBA

Real fun on an artificial island

BY THOMAS BEECHER

It's easy to think about Odaiba as a summer spot, with its sprawling manmade beach and seaside activities. But unlike other islands, Odaiba is a dynamic adventure land built to weather any season—even the coldest.

The artificial island was built during the late Edo Period as a defense fortress, partially developed during the boom and bust of the early 1990s, and then left virtually deserted until its resurrection almost a decade later.

Set sail with *Metropolis* and explore some of the best that the island has to offer.

THE YURIKAMOME LINE

While not quite an attraction—and only partially in Odaiba—this quick and easy rapid transit monorail is worth a mention. Depending on the time of day, you might need to fight for a spot with good window access. But the views are worth it as you speed above street level, meandering around Tokyo's skyscrapers, before crossing the Rainbow Bridge and onto the island. For the best views, try sitting in the front car, which provides 180-degree views.

Starts at Shimbashi; ends in Toyosu. One-day pass: ¥410-820. www.yurikamome.tokyo



Venus Fort

Photo by Thomas Beecher



Daiba-itchome Shotengai

Photo by Thomas Beecher

gai. Here, you can meander through the different decades of Japan's Shōwa Period (1926-1989), with a variety of attractions and stores selling all sorts of knick-knacks. The bazaar also holds a dizzying collection of retro arcade games, the most modern of which include Sega's timeless shoot-'em-ups *The House of the Dead* and *Virtua Cop 2*. The arcade is watched over by a life-sized replica of Mighty Atom (aka Astro Boy), which hangs from the ceiling.

1-6-1 Daiba, Minato-ku.

Odaiba-kaihinkoen. Shops open 11am-9pm; restaurants open 11am-midnight. www.odaiba-decks.com/services/en.php

PALETTE TOWN

As the name suggests, Palette Town has a little something for everyone, with a sprawling assortment of shopping and entertainment options that will leave a smile on anyone's face.

Among the different amusements is the family-friendly Tokyo Leisureland (free entry) with a large col-

lection of arcade and carnival-style games, including an array of oddly-themed simulated attractions with names like Ninja Castle and Spirituality World. Outside the center, you can cozy up on the Giant Sky Wheel, a 115-meter-high Ferris wheel with incredible views of Tokyo Harbor.

Palette Town also has abundant shopping at the well-presented Venus Fort, which includes an impressively bizarre 18th-century Europe-themed mall. Here, you can stroll along the ambient-lit Rue du Soleil or Via della Bellezza before taking a break at the Fountain Plaza, which bubbles away under a fake skylit dome.

1-3-15 Aomi, Koto-ku. Metro Aomi. Open daily at various times. www.palette-town.com

DECKS ODAIBA

A short walk from Palette Town, Decks is another mall packed full of shopping and entertaining oddities, including a number of indoor theme parks, a Madame Tussauds wax museum, and The Odaiba Takoyaki ("fried octopus balls") Museum.

The undisputed highlight, however, is the lurid nostalgia bazaar, Daiba-itchome Shoten-



ASIMO

MIRAIKAN

No trip to Odaiba is complete without a visit to the Miraikan (National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation). If Odaiba is the quintessential land of tomorrow, then the Miraikan is its heart, with a large exhibition of the latest trends in science and technology. The museum is also replete with futuristic gizmos and incredible breakthroughs, as well as a comfortable theater and planetarium.

While you're there, look out for ASIMO, the celebrity robot who appears at regular intervals to strut his stuff for gawking onlookers. The presentation is in Japanese only, but still worth watching, as ASIMO performs a series of nifty little dances before waving goodbye to the audience and returning to his home. Further on in the museum, you can also meet Otonaroid, the uncannily lifelike teleoperated android who answers any queries you might have about her or the museum (in Japanese and English).

2-3-6 Aomi, Koto-ku. Metro Telecom Center. Open Wed-Mon 10am-5pm. (Closed Dec 28-Jan 1). ¥210-620. www.miraikan.jst.go.jp/en/



MY LITTLE PONY RIDES INTO TOKYO



BY SAMUEL THOMAS, FASHION EDITOR

Making a slightly unlikely entrance onto the Tokyo fashion scene is My Little Pony, the beloved '80s Hasbro franchise that has returned to pop culture prominence around the world thanks to 2010's *Friendship is Magic*. This series reboot that spawned, among other things, the "brony" phenomenon—that is, grown men who watch the show; time will tell whether a similar culture develops around the franchise in Japan. For now, the *Rainbow Christmas in the Sky*-themed unveiling of the pop-up in the Isetan Girl fashion department of Isetan Shinjuku seems to have captured an altogether stylish following. The launch of the clothing and accessory line in the high-end fashion hub of Shinjuku follows hot on the heels of a successful themed café in the *kawaii*-culture haven of Ura-Harajuku, which seems to have put My Little Pony back on the cultural map for a new generation.

I say "back on the map" because the original generation of *kawaii* fashion aficionados who birthed this culture on the '90s Harajuku backstreets were directly inspired by the pastel-infused cute culture imported from the U.S. The original My Little Pony series was a core

Photos by Samuel Thomas



component of this movement. Over the years, imported “cute” gave rise to “kawaii” in fashion, and it took on a life of its own to become the uniquely Japanese culture celebrated today. Thanks to the likes of cult Koenji vintage shop Spank, who kept 1980s pastel alive as “mode” monochrome and chic fashion arrived in the late 2000s, kawaii stayed in vogue. Now, that pastel

cuteness seems to be back on girls’ fashion radar, and the timing couldn’t be better to bring the all-new My Little Pony to Tokyo.

Greeting fans at the launch was Harajuku and Lolita fashion icon RinRin Doll. The model was joined by new My Little Pony character Pinkie Pie, making for a suitably kawaii pairing that very much contextualized the brand in the otherwise luxurious Isetan. Early reports indicate that the brand is off to a storming start with a second volley of My Little Pony Japan-exclusive accessories and fashion set to join the lineup early next year. Highlights of the current lineup include items themed with artwork from both the retro

and new animated series, all next to sanctioned reinterpretations by some of Japan’s finest. One of these is illustrator Horaguchi Kayo, who put his own twist on the characters for a series of Isetan exclusives.

On the fashion side of things, kawaii was given a streetwear twist with a leather jacket emblazoned with motifs from the series, and hoodies that anyone could buy into. There were also more Harajuku-styled items that take someone like RinRin Doll to pull off: items packed with layers of sheer and lace, furry pompoms, and ultra-cute embroidery that begged you to enter the universe of My Little Pony. Actually seeing the plush toys lined up in-store next to the fashion brand really brings home just how much the fabrics and silhouettes of the Harajuku street scene have in common with plushes right now. As such, you can live every day in the rainbow world of My Little Pony if you choose. It seems for the current generation, fashion really is the toy of choice.

We’ll see whether My Little Pony will go on to build the fervent fan base it currently enjoys in Europe and America. However, I for one would advise you to keep an ear out for the distant sound of hooves trotting into Tokyo soon.





FEATURED MOVIE

PAWN SACRIFICE

In the middle of the last century, a lad emerged from Brooklyn who was better at a board game than anyone in history had ever been. Little would have been made of this by the world at large, except that the board game was chess, there was a Cold War raging, and certain U.S. government circles saw a huge potential PR coup if Bobby Fischer could whip the reigning world champion, Russian grandmaster Boris Spassky. This was harder to do than they thought, as Bobby

was obsessed, wildly paranoid, a misanthrope, and well on his way to becoming madder than a rat in a rain barrel. And also a raging anti-Semite, which is a good trick for a Jewish kid. Chess can't be the easiest game to fit into the sports movie formula, but Edward Zwick (*Glory*, *Legends of the Fall*, *Blood Diamond*) makes it work on this level—and it's only partly that. After all, when you look at it, the events chronicled in this handsomely crafted biopic are less about the noble game than the

psychological warfare for which it served as a proxy. A glowering Liev Schreiber is great as Spassky, who says little and in Russian, and Peter Sarsgaard hits the right notes with his portrayal of Father Bill Lombardy, Fischer's confidant and sparring partner. But this movie succeeds on the edgy and charismatic braggadocio performance by Tobey Maguire. It's his best work in ages. Absorbing, intelligent, and suspenseful. Japanese title: *Kanzen naru Checkmate*. (115 min)



CREED

I admit that I went in sneering, but I came out revitalized, thoroughly entertained, and even a little misty. Not a rehash;

it builds on the Rocky legend while trying something new. A main reason is the fine work in the title role by the up-and-coming Michael B. Jordan, who has the acting chops to match the ripped boxer's bod. The dynamic direction is by cowriter Ryan Coogler (*Fruitvale Station*). But the real surprise is the tender, finely nuanced performance by Sly himself. It's his best work since ... well, *Rocky* in 1976. At times, I wanted to stand up and cheer; at others, I needed my hanky. A knockout. (133 min)



HEAVEN KNOWS WHAT

This hour and a half with New York's marginalized young street junkies is not an easy sit. It's unrelentingly gritty

and depressing. But it's also transfixing, with jarring moments of humanity. There's no narrative; it's just scoring heroin, stealing to pay for it, and repeat. What drives this brutal yet lyrical film by Josh and Benny Safdie is the performance of Arielle Holmes, a recovering street junkie herself, on whose memoir this is based. All the supporting roles, save one, are played by non-actor street people. Not for everyone, but well-made, daring, and without a false moment or a gimmick. Japanese title: *Kamisama Nanka Kuso Kurae*. (94 min)



IN NO GREAT HURRY: 13 LESSONS IN LIFE WITH SAUL LEITER

Saul Leiter was a recognized master of the New York School of

street photography, up there with Robert Frank and Diane Arbus. He was a pioneer in the use of color in art photography. In contrast to the grittiness of his contemporaries, his works, mostly shot in the '50s, fairly glow. I suggest you buy a book of the work of this cordial old guy and give this film a miss. The first half of its title is accurate. Almost pathologically reticent to toot his own horn, Saul ... speaks ... very ... slowly. And while the film is as slow and amicable as its subject, there's not a great deal to learn about life, either. Japanese title: *Shashinka Saul Leiter*. (75 min)



LIFE

There's a famous photo of James Dean, collar turned up, cigarette dangling from his mouth, braving a snowstorm in Times Square. This is the story behind that photo. Robert Pattinson does his best work to date (but this is not hard) as freelance photographer Dennis Stock, and the talented Dane DeHaan (*Chronicle*), for not looking at all like Dean, captures the star's charisma. Despite an occasionally heavy-handed script, director Anton Corbijn's assured direction, aided immeasurably by cinematographer Charlotte Bruus Christensen's wonderful use of light and shadow, make this a biodrama well worth a look. Japanese title: *Dean, Kimi ga Ita Toki*. (11 min)



SHE'S FUNNY THAT WAY

You can take Peter Bogdanovich out of the '70s, but maybe you can't take the '70s out of Bogdanovich. This broad bedroom farce was written decades ago and shows it. *What's Up Doc?* was a funny flick, but do we really need another? A noted director (Owen Wilson) practices the hobby of rescuing call girls by giving them a sack of cash with which to pursue their dreams. His latest "conquest" is a New York-accented Imogen Poots. All the (hard-working) characters in this would-be screwball comedy are somehow interconnected. It's a bumper-car ride. Lots of stuff happens; none of it matters. Japanese title: *My Funny Lady*. (93 min)



STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON

Another rags-to-riches-to-fractions-decline tale of pop stardom, but it's also vigorously entertaining, educational, and perhaps more provocative than most. Because we're talking about N.W.A., progenitors of gangsta rap and the first group to channel black rage at abusive police into, for want of a better word, music. This piece of hip-hop history, centering on Easy-E, Dr. Dre, and Ice Cube (Jason Mitchell, Corey Hawkins, and O'Shay Jackson, Jr., Cube's son), unfolds in the '80s, but the group's message still speaks to our post-Ferguson world. I'm not a fan of the subgenre, but this is a pretty good movie. (147 min)



TWO NIGHT STAND

Two nice young people who've "never done anything like this before" hook up via an online dating service and have a horrible time, culminating in an acrimonious morning-after "goodbye forever." But a door-blocking blizzard only a screenwriter could dream up turns their one-nighter into the title tryst. Ah. You catch on fast. The second night gives them the chance to bond, find love, and talk your ears off. This predictable, stubbornly generic rom-com is kept moderately compelling by the chemistry between overqualified leads Miles Teller (*Whiplash*) and Analeigh Tipton (*Crazy, Stupid, Love*). Japanese title: *Kimi to Ita Futsukakan*. (86 min)



THE LITTLE PRINCE

This respectful re-imagining of Antoine Saint-Exupéry's timeless 1943 children's tale adds all sorts of frills but remains true to its theme of childhood wonderment versus grown-up rigidity. The story has to do with a pilot (voiced by Jeff Bridges) who has crashed in the Sahara meeting a strange boy who claims to be the sole inhabitant of a distant asteroid and is full of stories about self-important adults. This slender, ethereal tale (in clay-animation) is nested within an amusing, present-day struggle (in cutting-edge CGI) between an imaginative child and her goal-oriented mother. Absolutely charming. Japanese title: *Little Prince: Hoshi no Ojisan to Watashi*. (108 min)



THE PEANUTS MOVIE

I can't count myself among the admirers of this technically elaborate adaptation of the Charles Schulz comic strip, which for 65 years has captured the small joys and frustrations of being a kid. Simple, no? This cash-grab, scripted by Schulz's son and grandson, hits all its marks: the kite-eating tree, failing at baseball, Snoopy as WWI ace, etc. But good grief! You're not supposed to even see, let alone hear, the formerly off-panel little red-haired girl. In a bloated subplot, Snoopy zooms around a lot on his doghouse, mostly to give the colossally useless 3-D something to do. Augh! Made me sad. Japanese title: *I Love Snoopy: The Peanuts Movie*. (88 min)



SPECTRE

Neither as meaningful as *Skyfall* nor as tiresome as *Quantum of Solace*, this 24th Bond film offers all the requisite fast cars and planes, gorgeous women, dry wit, an unhinged megalomaniac, lethal gadgets, kick-ass fight scenes, and even kitschy opening credits—all presented in dynamic, precisely choreographed set pieces. Sure, it's checklist predictable, but to Bond fans that's not always a bad thing, and this remains a ludicrously entertaining night at the movies. Daniel Craig remains the best Bond whose name isn't Connery. Ralph Fiennes is M, Ben Whishaw is Q, and Christoph Waltz is the bad guy. Japanese title: *007 Spectre*. (148 min)



HE NAMED ME MALALA

The Taliban probably didn't imagine, when they shot Malala Yousafzai in the face for advocating education for women, that they were creating a powerful international movement against their twisted worldview. This deft and genuinely moving piece of advocacy journalism by Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*) informs us why the Taliban targeted her, and that her educator/activist father Ziauddin named her for a 19th-century Pashtun warrior poet who inspired her countrymen to rally against the British. Perhaps the most amazing thing about this extraordinary teenager is just how ordinary she is. Japanese title: *Watashi wa Malala*. (88 min)



ART AND CRAFT

A shy, possibly troubled painter and pathological liar named Mark Landis has had his artworks shown in at least 46 museums. But the works are signed Picasso, Warhol, Holbien, Cassatt, and even Seuss. Landis, you see, is a master art forger. So why isn't he in jail instead of the subject of an admiring documentary? That's the fun part. He donated all of the paintings, never taking a dime, and therefore committed no crime save for embarrassing a few museum curators (and exposing their smug mumbo-jumbo as manipulative). Culminates, strangely, in his own solo show of fake art. Just weird. Japanese title: *Bijutsukan wo Tedama ni Totta Otoko*. (89 min)



THE GREEN INFERNO

A band of idealistic, privileged, millennial activists who travel to the Amazon jungle to save an indigenous tribe from some evil corporate logging development undergoes an abrupt change of political stance when the tribe in question starts eating them. But this retread pastiche by schlockmeister Eli Roth is less concerned with cultural irony than with imaginatively executing annoying cannibal-fodder. As expected of a Roth experience, the acting's awful (except maybe for lead Lorenza Izzo, the director's wife), the dialogue moronic, the horror kind of desperate, and the gore plentiful. Yuck. (100 min)



COMET

This high-energy look at the highs and lows of breaking up and making up by first-timer Sam Esmail alternates between original and overwritten, simplicity and convoluted, and elegance and fussiness. Committed principals Justin Long and Emmy Rossum also alternate between engaging and off-putting, and by the end it's hard to care how they end up. The timeframe-jumping structure can be distracting, but it somehow fits in with how one might look back over incidents in the lifespan of a relationship. Worth a look, depending on your resistance to talky movies. I've sat through much worse. (91 min)



WOMAN IN GOLD

This is the true story of Jewish Austrian octogenarian émigré Maria Altmann (Helen Mirren) and her legal struggle to recover the title Klimt, looted by the Nazis in the 1930s. As the movie starts, in the 1990s, the (renamed) painting hangs in Austria's Belvedere Museum, which considers it the "Mona Lisa of Austria" and criminally confuses possession with ownership. Maria hires untested lawyer Randal Schoenberg (Ryan Reynolds), who takes the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. The film toggles between the recent past and the '30s, and between stirring and sappy. Of greater historic than dramatic interest. Japanese title: *Ogon no Adele: Meiga no Kikan*. (109 min)

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CINEMATIC UNDERGROUND

FROM AUSCHWITZ TO TIMBUKTU

BY KEVING MCGUE

It doesn't get much more underground than this. The documentary *Doglegs* takes us into the little-known world of a professional wrestling league in Tokyo made up of handicapped fighters. The men and women featured don't let their physical and mental disabilities keep them from climbing into the ring, where they battle it out for victory as well as acceptance and admiration. As the

group enters its 20th year, the leader and the group's most famous wrestler both want to retire—but not before one last showdown. Directed by Tokyo veteran Heath Cozens, the doc screens with English subtitles, starting January 9 at Theater Pole-Pole (4-4-1 Higashi Nakano, Nakano-ku; www.mmjp.or.jp/pole2).

During last year's Oscar race, the film *Timbuktu* was in the odd position of being up

for Best Film in a Foreign Language while being banned from cinemas in France for fears that it would inspire terrorism. It's actually an unflinching look at the horrors of militancy, showing how a cattle herder's family was destroyed by the brief occupation of the title city in Mali in 2012. In French with some Arabic and Japanese subtitles, playing now at Eurospace in Shibuya (1-5 Maruyamacho, Shibuya-ku; www.eurospace.co.jp).

The Hungarian Holocaust drama *Son of Saul* has already had a successful run before coming to Japan, picking up an award at Cannes and a nomination for a Golden Globe, and being chosen as the country's official submission to the Oscars. Set at Auschwitz, it follows a Jewish worker's desperate search for a rabbi to give a child a proper burial. In Hungarian with Japanese subtitles, on from January 23 at Cinema Qualite (3-37-12 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; <http://qualite.musashino-k.jp>).

Prolific South Korean director Kim Ki-duk returns with his latest film *One on One*. Ostensibly a revenge thriller about a vigilante group hunting down seven people implicated in the death of a high school student, it also touches on some of the country's social issues. In Korean with Japanese subtitles, on from January 16 at Human Trust Cinema Yurakucho (2-7-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku; www.ttcg.jp/human_yurakucho).

EIGA

HER FATHER, MY LOVER

BY ROB SCHWARTZ

Inter-generational romances are hardly unusual in Japan, but this pic by TV commercial director Kenji Yamauchi goes one step further and has Maya (Wako Ando) getting involved with Kyo-suke (Mitsuru Fukikoshi), the father of her close high school friend Taeko (Yukino Kishii). The heart of the story is Maya, who disregards the disgust of those around her (particularly Taeko) and pursues the older man relentlessly. In fact, she's already had an affair with her high school teacher Tadokoro (Takenori Kaneko), a pathetic whiner who will prove her undoing. This soap opera-like yarn also has Kyo-suke in an affair with another woman, who is carrying his baby, and in the middle of a divorce from Taeko's mother Mi-



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dori (Kei Ishibashi). Making its world premiere at the Tokyo International Film Festival in October, it's funny, dramatic, corny, and melodramatic in turns. In short, this piece is unsure what it wants to be. At first blush a romantic comedy, it heads off in

all directions, leaving the audience a bit confused. Despite that, it's well-acted, mostly realistic, and addresses a serious corner of Japanese romance. Worth a view. Japanese title: *Tomodachi no papa ga suki*. (105 min.)



JACK TEMPCHIN LEARNS TO DANCE

SoCal survivor finds new wind

BY DAN GRUNEBAUM

American singer-songwriter Jack Tempchin is tickled to find himself at a better place later in his career than he expected.

"I'm 68. I should be on a porch in a rocking chair," Tempchin chuckles down the line from his home in San Diego.

The force behind iconic Eagles hits like "Peaceful Easy Feeling," Tempchin is experiencing a renaissance in his long career—one that will, for the first time, bring him to Japan.

A native of San Diego, Tempchin launched his songwriting career amid the coffee house folk music scene of late-'60s Southern California, and then became a key songwriter for the Laurel Canyon community in Los Angeles that spawned the Eagles.

The intervening decades have been a mixed bag of concert hall stages and local bars and restaurants, but Tempchin now finds himself with a record contract and solo tour for the first time in years.

"I was very surprised to get a record deal, because I'm not in a commercial category these days," he explains about his new album,

Learning To Dance. "But a record company sought me out and were fans of my work. More than the money, what blew me away was the fact that somebody cared."

The album is a kind of concept piece that traces the contours of love through a person's life. "It begins with finding somebody and being euphorically in love, then the real world enters the picture, and later there's a song called 'What If We Should Fall in Love Again?'," he relates. "I think everyone will hear themselves in it. It's a mellow album, but I just tried to write meaningful songs. It harkens back to the days when people used to sit down and listen to a whole album."

Learning To Dance ended up getting a fair bit of airplay and providing renewed attention for Tempchin, who's also backed the likes of Hall and Oates and Ringo Starr as a warm-up act. He followed up the album with an EP that has a song about divorce, called "The High Cost of Hate." "I wasn't going to play it," he deadpans, "but I got a gig that turned out to be for 200 of the country's top divorce attorneys—they gave it a standing ovation."

Tempchin's long relationship with the Eagles came out of a chance meeting with Glenn Frey in San Diego in the early '70s. Tempchin managed an open mic night at a coffee house, where Frey and another Eagles songwriter, JD Souther, appeared as a duo.

The chemistry was instantaneous. "Every time they came to town, they would stay at my hippie pad, and we got to be good friends," Tempchin recalls. "So part of my advice to people is, get to be friends with a superstar about five years before they get famous."

"Peaceful Easy Feeling" began as a country song. "Glenn heard 'Peaceful' and said, 'Hey, I've got a new band. Can I play it with them?'" Tempchin says. "So the next day, he played a cassette of the new band, which turned out to be the Eagles, doing the song. Then they went to England and recorded it. My wife and I were traveling in our Volkswagen bus around the States and heard the song coming out of a little radio."

Being the author of the Eagles classics "Peaceful Easy Feeling" and "Already Gone" didn't prevent Tempchin from encountering slow points in his career. But he always enjoyed playing music, and even to this day hits the streets of San Diego to busk unannounced.

"I do it when I feel like it," he asserts. "I don't tell anyone who I am, to get back into the spirit of the whole thing. I try to be a professional, so when people pay to see me, I play what they want to hear. But when I started out, I was a big fan of the blues; so when I go downtown I can play the blues all night."

Jack's irrepressible positivity has a way of winning audiences over quickly, a skill that will hold him in good stead in his first tour of Japan, courtesy of longtime roots music presenter Buffalo Records, run by American Doug Alsop.

"I never stopped writing songs and playing a thousand percent," Tempchin concludes. "Some people go in and out; the ground changes under you; record companies weren't supportive of a singer-songwriter like me. But even the times when I wasn't as successful were fabulous."

Yokohama Thumbs Up, Jan 18; Shimokitazawa Garden, Jan 26, and other venues.
Info: <http://j.mp/jacktempchin2016>



**I THINK EVERYONE WILL
HEAR THEMSELVES IN IT.
IT'S A MELLOW ALBUM,
BUT I JUST TRIED TO
WRITE MEANINGFUL
SONGS."**



POP ETC. SOUVENIR

BY ANDY HUGHES

Pop Etc. are moving further away from the reverb-soaked geek-indie of their previous incarnation, The Morning Benders, to create ... well, reverb-soaked, radio-friendly pop music. As with their previous self-titled album, the band shift their style towards inoffensive Top 40 territory and wear their childhood influences on their sleeves. *Souvenir* is an unashamed homage to the music the band grew up listening to.

There's a real '80s and early-'90s dance music/R&B feel to this record, and almost all the tracks would comfortably fit onto a nightclub's playlist. The guitars are more minimal now, thrown to the back of the mix and only occasionally prominent. Synths are the instrument of choice, and are the driving force for most, if not all, of the melodies. Although this record is clearly inspired by music of yore, this is synth-pop with a very modern-sounding approach to the production that's reminiscent of current R&B.

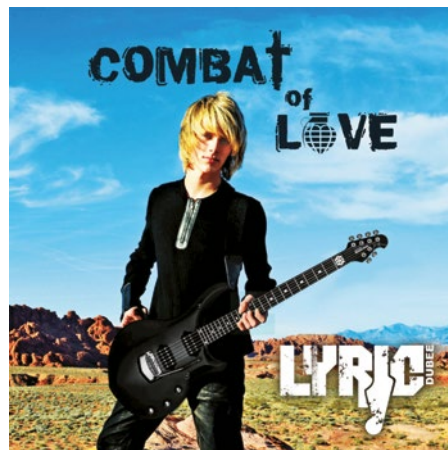
While the simplicity of the drums allows the melodies more breathing space, the rhythms barely change, and this can make the listening experience feel repetitive. The beats have a dance-music consistency to them, but lack any sort of diversity. As with the band's previous offering, the vocals have taken on an auto-tuned sound; and even though no criticism can be pointed at Chris Chu's vocal ability, the robotic delivery makes me wish for something more organic—some sign that it is a human singing. This can also be said of the instrumentation, which is a carefully constructed, reverb-washed series of innocuous melodies. However shiny the production may be, for a band like this, it's important to hear a glimmer of the human behind the instrument, even if just occasionally.

Souvenir has the sound of a band playing it safe. It feels like a conscious decision to aim for mainstream success and to tap into a style that is currently very popular. However, it lacks conviction and any sort of sincerity. They're trying to honor their influences shamelessly, but instead, the result is something closer to parody. Rather than having highs and lows, dynamic shifts in mood or atmosphere, this record plods a middle ground and stays firmly there for its duration.

As their name implies, this is pop music, and could easily appeal to a mass audience, as the songs are instantly listenable and don't pose any sort of challenge. *Souvenir* doesn't break any new ground when compared to their previous work, but still might be worth a listen for fans of bands like The Royal Concept, Passion Pit, Foster the People, Death Cab for Cutie, Maroon 5, and We Are Scientists.

If you heard this record at a club or party, you wouldn't be begging the DJ to change the record. But at the same time, you wouldn't be compelled to have a repeat listen any time soon after.

***Souvenir* out Jan 27.**



LYRIC DUBEE COMBAT OF LOVE

BY LAURIER TIERNAN

The cover of Lyric Dubee's fourth album, *Combat of Love*, breeds questions like urgent screams in the mind of the observer. Is this what Kurt Cobain would have looked like if he had grown up happy? Is this what Bryan Adams would have looked like if he was born 40 years later and had started out in his native Ontario? Is the femininity displayed in this photograph just part of an '80s-esque stage persona, or is it more personal?

Lyric's official bio proclaims that he mastered jazz, rock, and many other genres at a young age—he's currently 17—and that now he espouses his own genre of "revolution rock." From a more scientific perspective, his music mostly consists of a fusion of pop-rock and '80s metal guitars.

With vocal tones reminiscent of those of Ed Sheeran and Passenger, and delivery similar to that of groups like One Direction, Dubee can appeal to millions of screaming teenage girls with sensitive pop anthems. Wielding his guitar like a young Richie Sambora, he essentially incorporates a timely hybrid of the most successful musical offerings of the '80s, with occasional nods to musicians' musicians like Rush and Radiohead. The intro to *Combat*'s second track, "15 Feet Away," bears much more than a slight resemblance to the first few bars of Rush's "Tom Sawyer." The 12 tracks on the album mostly stand out as radio-friendly and soundtrack-ready anthems that are at once substantial enough to be dissected and gentle enough to serve as background music.

Dubee could well be the next Jon Bon Jovi: equally at home and confident writing his own songs, composing with others, and performing in various genres like the seasoned entertainer that he already is. It's when he steps out of his comfort zone, however, that he truly lets his genius bloom. In "Song For You," his willingness to take it down quite a few notches in speed, bring in a piano, and opt for a sensitivity similar to a slower Savage Garden song, is a move that really lets his strengths be highlighted by his vulnerability. And on the album's closer "Soundscape City," he introduces elements of EDM for the first time—a playful hint at "the future," both metaphorical, and hypothetically, regarding his own career. He sings the first few lines in a hoarse whisper, before finally admitting, "I don't know where to go."

Of course, the young Lyric surely does know where to go. With the restlessness of his musical exploration—four albums into his career, before the age of 18—he has already accomplished the difficult task of building public anticipation to find out what his next destination will be.

In the meantime, there's enough aural meat on *Combat of Love* to satisfy most fans of pop-rock, even through repeated listens.

***Combat of Love* out now.**

POP LIFE



Pop Etc.'s Chris Chu on Japan and *Souvenir*

BY MARTIN LEROUX

When The Morning Benders announced that they would undergo a name change in 2012, many wondered if this shift would extend to their music. The news came just as the Berkeley-turned-Brooklyn-based group were putting the final touches on their anticipated follow-up to 2010's *Big Echo*, an album that showcased the band's dreamy brand of '60s-tinged indie pop and amassed them a following worldwide.

After the announcement, the group resurfaced as Pop Etc., a name vocalist and guitarist Chris Chu deems representative of the band's playful, experimental nature and eclectic tastes.

"We really like to try lots of different kinds of music," Chu tells *Metropolis* during a recent trip to Tokyo, his So-Cal roots evident in his laid-back tone. He states the versatility of the pop genre is fitting, seeing as he cannot foresee what direction the band's sound will evolve in.

"The word 'pop' is kind of hard to define. If you define it as 'popular,' it doesn't really tell you what it is. But to me, it's a way of approaching art that prioritizes making some aspect of it memorable—or somehow broad enough to hit a lot of people."

Post-name change, Pop Etc.—a trio comprised of Chu, his brother Jon, and drummer Julian Harmon—released a self-titled EP that proved the departure from The Morning Benders was also stylistic. In the stead of *Big Echo*'s surf-pop guitars was a synth-laden electro-pop sound.

Three years after the EP's release, the band is

preparing to release *Souvenir* in January, their first official album as Pop Etc. Chu says that unlike the initial EP, which the band wasn't

able to focus on due to constant touring, the trio took their time in writing and recording *Souvenir*, resulting in a more cohesive sound—even if it meant fans had to wait a while.

"In the beginning, we decided that we weren't going to rush to put anything out by any timeline. We just wanted to make sure we were all a hundred percent happy with it."

On *Souvenir*, Pop Etc. is transported two decades into the future from the '60s, where The Morning Benders left off. Touches of New Wave ("Bad Break") and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers-esque stadium rock ("Running Around in Circles") lace the tracks on the album, showing the massive influence the decade has had on the three members.

"We've always liked the '80s, but I think a lot of people that didn't grow up during that time get a weird slice of it. Like how people normally absorb music, you only get the hits. It's just the tip of the iceberg," Chu says. "We just had this epiphany in the last few years, while we were making this album—at the beginning of it. Why haven't we gone and researched these bands more?"

Chu was initially hesitant to venture into the

'80s musically due to the fact that the decade is fairly recent, which factored in to the three-year gap between albums.

"Part of the reason that didn't happen for a while is, the '80s are still... they're not old enough that they've been completely written into history. Like '60s classic rock, [which] everyone just knows, like *Abbey Road*."

Still, the band has hardly been idle in the gap between albums. Since their name change, Pop Etc. has branched out into the Japanese music industry, producing for and performing with Japanese artists, including Yoko Kanno and Kaela Kimura. Among their collaborations, it's Pop Etc.'s work with J-rockers Galileo Galilei that most struck a chord.

"It was especially surprising because I had no idea how this Japanese band found me and reached out to me, so that was really surprising," muses Chu. "Then you got the language barrier, so there were all these kinds of obstacles that we had to overcome to make it happen. As soon as I met them, heard their music, and [started] playing with

them, it just really clicked. We have very similar ideas about music, and we're both very voracious, open-minded consumers. We're always looking for new music and new art."

Japan has also influenced the band's direction in other ways. Japan was Chu's birthplace, and he maintained a deep connection with the country.

"My parents were really interested in Japan; they always had all these pictures of me as a kid here and of their friends here," says Chu. "It was always this distant place that always was a part of me, but I didn't ever get to live in; I was so young when we moved to California. But when I came back, I felt a very strong closeness to the culture here and the people here, and it felt very natural."

Chu's relationship with Japan was a crucial component in the creation of the aptly-titled *Souvenir*, which not only harks back to an influential time period, but also an important place.

"The album, I wrote a lot of it in Japan, and a lot of it was just fueled by my experiences of coming here and working with artists here, and going back and forth," Chu explains. "It's impossible for me to even think about this album without Japan."

***Souvenir* out Jan 27.**



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STAGE

NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE EXCHANGE

Bringing the Bard Across Borders

BY MARTIN LEROUX



Brendan Averett, Sean Hinckley, and Kerry Kastin in NYSX's *Titus Andronicus* (2015)

Photo by Katie Westling

Shakespeare's works might be labeled as "classical," but they remain as relevant in the 21st century as they were in his day.

According to Ross Williams, director and founder of theater company New York Shakespeare Exchange (NYSX), connecting today's world to the Bard is a matter of delivery.

"I love Shakespeare and I have spent a lot of time both seeing and creating productions of the plays," says Williams, who has been in professional theater for most of his life. Following an eight-year stage career, his passion for Shakespeare led him to transition from acting to directing, and he found the Exchange in 2010.

"I find that Shakespeare's characters and poetry get inside me like no other literature can. It inspires my creativity, it opens my emotional being, and it engages my intellect."

NYSX was established with the intent to demystify Shakespeare and disprove the notion that his works are dated or inaccessible. According to Williams, the text is bursting with thrill and intrigue; it's just about finding the right way to infuse Shakespeare with contemporary culture.

"Shakespeare can, when performed with clarity, specificity, and emotional investment, rock audiences to the core," says the director. "Still, there are a ton of people in the world who say, 'Shakespeare is over my head' or 'Shakespeare is boring'—potentially my least favorite phrase, ever. Plays like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* are as action-packed as any blockbuster film released today,

but if the work is not performed well, it can hit audiences like a ton of bricks and feel both unapproachable and unintelligible. My mission with NYSX is to get Shakespeare into people's lives in relevant and exciting ways."

And the company is having fun delivering Shakespeare to the public. Their acclaimed productions put innovative twists on the plays: their 2015 performance of *Titus Andronicus* transported the tragedy to a modern carnival setting. NYSX also holds ShakesBEER pub crawls, where actors perform fragments of Shakespeare plays in bars throughout New York City, using counter-tops and tables as a stage while audiences watch.

"A lot of people in the world have only witnessed Shakespeare in their high school classroom, where they were told ... that his works must be loved and respected as near-perfect literature. That can be really alienating," admits Williams. "But Shakespeare was a pop-culture icon. We know that audiences of all ages, education levels, and classes were clamoring to see his plays. He had mass appeal. Our goal at NYSX is to find that for today's audiences."

Another avenue for this is The Sonnet Project, which Williams created to couple Shakespeare with film. The project soon evolved into an ongoing series of independent short films based on the Bard's sonnets, filmed in various New York locations by local actors and filmmakers.

The Sonnet Project has been successful in joining the brilliance of Shakespeare with that

of New York, but Williams wants to bring it to the world. Under The Sonnet Project 2.0, Williams is traveling to Japan to work with a Japanese actor for the project's first international film.

"I have a fantasy that people all over the world will be inspired to take a second look at Shakespeare and, from there, be inspired to look at all poetic text differently. There's a serious lack of poetry in our news- and media-soaked world, and if we can help add a little poetry into people's lives, I will feel satisfied."

While in Japan, Williams will also work with Japan-based theater groups on a production of Edward Albee's Tony-winning tragicomedy, *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*, which Williams will direct.

In addition, Williams will lead a workshop, "Embodying Shakespeare," wherein he guides participants—non-performers included—through exercises that let them fully absorb Shakespeare.

"Working with Shakespeare can be really powerful. It allows for a connection to breath and emotions that we don't experience in the 'regular' world, and that can carry through to our daily interactions, any public speaking, and even how we present our personal power.

"I may be biased, but I think spending time with Shakespeare is transformative."

***The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* Jan 21-24, various times. ¥4,000. Trance Mission Theater, 4-50-8 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku. ☎ Sangubashi. Embodying Shakespeare. Jan 16, 9am-4:30pm. ¥ 17,000-20,000. <http://j.mp/neptunetheater>**

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TAKASHI MURAKAMI

The internationally acclaimed artist proves himself to his homeland

BY C.B. LIDDELL

Takashi Murakami is one of those Japanese artists who seem to be a lot more popular with people outside of Japan than within. That's certainly my experience by quite a wide margin. This is a reflection of the fact that, like automobiles and electronics, the Japanese contemporary art market is skewed heavily towards export, where Murakami's *otaku*-flavored pop art plays remarkably well, while he is often dismissed in Japan as tacky and jejune.

His latest big exhibition at the Mori Museum of Art, "Takashi Murakami: The 500 Arhats," seems to be an attempt to address this disjunction, with his art moving strongly in a direction that references traditional Japanese art.

The 500 Arhats refers to 500 "perfected persons" who've attained nirvana ... in other words, Buddhist saints. Painting 500 of them has long been considered something of a spiritual exercise for Buddhists, although one wonders just how much of a "spiritual exercise" it was for Murakami, who is anything but a lonely artist working in his garret. Instead, he normally works with a kind of factory setup and dozens of assistants.

For this show, he also drafted hundreds of art college students, who interestingly now have been "planted" with an emotional interest in seeing Murakami's work accepted by the Japanese art establishment. This is something that may benefit Murakami's reputation in the long run, as these students become artists, curators, and museum admins.

While many of the images are initially

impressive—being large, garishly colored, and with an excellent finish—when all is said and done, they are *manga*-esque images full of knowing irony. They're post-modern additions, grafted onto a tradition defined by genuine belief and piety.

The only element that seems to emotionally resonate is the nihilistic note that underscores some of the work, like the *Enso* (2015) series of paintings, pop-art renditions of the Zen Buddhist tradition of emptying the mind by painting circles, and the impressive *Flame of Desire* (2013), a spiraling tower of flame holding a cartoonish skull made from carbon fiber, covered with gold leaf.

The real genius in Murakami's case is not so much his artistic ability—which many "lesser artists" could match or surpass, and which is anyway supplemented by his numerous assistants—but his managerial ability, social power, and geek understanding of how the modern internet-driven media works.

For example, for this exhibition, he has relaxed the usually tight rules about photographing or filming artworks, in the hope that the exhibition will go viral and sell itself through social media.



This embrace of modern, internet-facilitated egoism runs directly counter to the self-effacing message of Buddhism the exhibition is ostensibly about. From one point of view, this represents continuity with the ironic art of Murakami's past, but from another, it contradicts Murakami's goal of becoming more accepted by the Japanese mainstream.

His strategy to reposition himself by seeking entry into the pantheon of traditional and respected

Japanese artists could well backfire and may further alienate Japanese audiences, who have always been lukewarm to him. This is especially true given his use of religious art to achieve his purpose.

The question remains: will this exhibition mark the point at which Murakami shuffles off his prodigal "geek" image and is welcomed into the Japanese classical tradition, or will he simply be sniffed at as an unkempt interloper attempting to gatecrash a party to which he's not invited? Whatever the outcome, this exhibition represents a dramatic chapter in Murakami's career.

Mori Art Museum, until Mar 6. www.mori.art.museum/contents/tm500/

THE CRAFT AWAKENS

Michel Bielecki and Swispon aim to save traditional Japanese craftsmanship

BY C BRYAN JONES

We have the technology. We have the capability to make products that are better than they were before. Better ... stronger ... faster. But do we want to? In the modern world, technology infiltrates every part of our lives, and with it come techniques for mass production that render the craftsmanship of the past a quaint memory in the minds of elders. It may seem convenient—and in fact it may be. But part of what makes Japanese culture special is being lost in the process. Soon, it will be gone forever.

This doesn't sit well with everyone, and Swiss entrepreneur/filmmaker Michel Bielecki and his startup Swispon aim to turn the tide in favor of tradition with the documentary *Heirs of a Forgotten Time*. It's a project born of business that took an unexpected turn toward preservation.

As Bielecki explains to *Metropolis*, "Initially the idea was that we were just going to help get Japanese products over to Europe and get European products to Japan—traditional crafts and goods being part of it. But after a time we noticed that people are most interested in these craft goods only."

This realization connected well with Bielecki's own experiences traveling in Japan, hitchhiking his way from Aomori to Kyushu. Along the way, he met many interesting craftsmen. Upon returning to Switzerland, his quest to order *tatami* mats online turned out to be difficult, highlighting the problem traditional crafts face in the modern world.

"The only thing I could find was some stuff on Alibaba, some Chinese-produced fakes, and I asked myself 'What's the problem here?' This is where my interest for traditional handicrafts started developing," explains the filmmaker. "I started researching, and I noticed that these guys don't have successors, so a lot of them are basically dying out. Every year, we have less and less craftsmen."

The core problem, as Bielecki sees it, is the lack of communication. "They are fantastic at

what they are doing. They're very dedicated, they're doing it with their whole heart, but they don't know how to get it to a broader audience."

So the Swispon mission shifted from simply bringing Japanese products to the Europe to giving a voice to the talented artisans who create the crafts.

To do this, Bielecki assembled an international team of creatives with a passion for Japan that includes American cinematographer, sound expert, and editor T.C. Deane; fellow American photographer Anthony Wood; and Michelle Basco, an animator, web designer, and editor from the Philippines. Joining them to help with communications and relationship management are Junko Wood and Satoki Kon of Japan.

Together this team is working with five

families in Japan and one in Switzerland to tell the story of traditional Japanese crafts, their history, and the process of making them. Connecting with these families, however, wasn't easy.

"We were trying for months to get the trust of one of the families, and it seemed just impossible because we were young, we were inexperienced, they didn't know us," laments Bielecki. Thankfully, fate stepped in and a friend working at the Austrian Embassy in Japan connected Michel with artists from Ishikawa who were in Vienna for a big exhibition. "And thus the first step to building trust was done. Three months later in Davos, where we invited them to join for 'JAN,' Switzerland's biggest Japan convention, they—as the first family—agreed to collaborate with us."



Yoshizawa Go, Hirosaki



Shigeru Imai, Niigata



Shigeru Imai, Niigata



“
PEOPLE CAN
COMMUNICATE WITH THE
PEOPLE WHO ARE BEHIND
THE PRODUCT, CAN SEE
WHO IS DOING IT AND
HOW IT'S DONE.



Yasuhara Teruaki, Nagano



With the pieces in place, the crew began a seven-day drive across Japan to meet with the artisan families one by one, shooting in detail the process of creating their crafts, as well as interviewing them to preserve the history and knowledge of each family.

The results can be seen in the video they've created for the Kickstarter campaign (<http://meturl.com/heirskickstarter>) that will fund the editing and post-production of the documentary. The flavor may not be quite what you expect, which is Bielecki's goal.

"We've made a trailer that I think is polarizing people a little bit. I've heard comments saying that the music is inappropriate, it's much too dynamic, it's much too fast. But these comments were mostly coming from older generations, so I was

actually happy because this is exactly what I was trying to achieve." Getting younger people to see traditional crafts as cool is, as Bielecki sees it, the key to preventing the extinction of the art forms and making them relevant to the modern world. It's all about communication.

To this end, the documentary is but a piece of the puzzle. Swispon has launched a new online platform called ZenPuls (<http://zenpuls.com>) that is designed to remove the communication barrier between craftsman and client. The service facilitates communication between craftsmen in Japan and clients abroad by providing hand-crafted translations of every single message. "People can communicate with the people who are behind the product, can see who is doing it and how it's done," Bielecki says. "[Customers

are] assured that they have the highest quality and authenticity here, and they can exactly know where it's from and what it's about." The team speaks 10 languages in all, so ZenPuls truly can reach a broad customer base previously inaccessible to the average Japanese craftsman.

Together, ZenPuls and *Heirs of a Forgotten Time* promise to bring traditional Japanese crafts to a whole new generation worldwide. It's a fascinating project, and this story has only scratched the surface.

The documentary Kickstarter runs through Tuesday, January 12. Tune in to the *Metropolis On Air* podcast (<http://meturl.com/metonair7>) for a deeper look at both the documentary and the ZenPuls platform through our half-hour interview with Bielecki.

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GOING UNDERGROUND

BY SAMUEL THOMAS

Welcome to “Subculture,” a new regular feature in *Metropolis* that explores the depths and heights of the Tokyo underground. Even today, Japan’s subcultures tend to be many people’s first interaction with the country, with Akihabara’s maids and J-pop bands having long replaced geisha and samurai as cultural ambassadors. However, as the internet provided unprecedented access to the Cool Japan generation—whose primitive ancestors had to actually import magazines for a taste of what was happening in the backstreets—it’s still hard to access all areas, with so much of the city’s culture still limited to those actually on the ground.

At the same time, there is also a problem of perception. The recent sight of a foreign tourist towing a suitcase through Shinjuku Station in full *Naruto* cosplay garb is a reminder that what some abroad think is mainstream is actually very much niche. There’s a gulf between being a fan and actively displaying it in Japanese society, with even a poor choice of anime phone strap enough to get one laughed out of a meeting. It’s a disconnect that’s especially difficult to counteract,



given the Japanese subcultures’ alliance with increasingly aging youthful rebellion abroad. The reality is that Japan is an incredibly conservative country—albeit one with vibrant subcultures in reaction to the conservative mainstream.

Take for instance the 89th Comic Market, also known as Comiket, scheduled to see off 2015 from December 29 to 31. Held at the iconic venue Tokyo Big Sight, it’s a market in name but really a festival of Japanese subcultures, held twice annually, that can lay claim to being Japan’s biggest public gathering year after year. (Let that sink in for a moment.) The event will see the greatest aggregation of shared interests across its three days, attracting different and disparate people under a common cause. And yet, apart from news stories that will inevitably focus on the labyrinthine queue, it enjoys no real presence in the cultural mainstream—except for the people who flock to it.

It’s this dynamic that has always defined Japanese subcultures, in that they genuinely are beneath the surface. To be a “real” punk abroad, you need to live the lifestyle, get the tattoos, and preferably be in a state of perpetual tantrum; in Japan, once you’ve washed the spikes out of your hair and bathed away the sweat from the gig, you’re good to go to the office the next day. There are some exceptions, but the focus on temporary appearance and participation allows for the “office lady by day, Lolita fashionista by night” mentality, which seems to provide fertile ground for



new subcultures to form. Understandably, going “lifestyle” with a subculture appeals to those who want to opt out altogether, but there’s something nice about knowing the person cosplaying at Comiket might be the same person sharing your morning commute. It binds people together not just in their guilty pleasures, but in their daily lives.

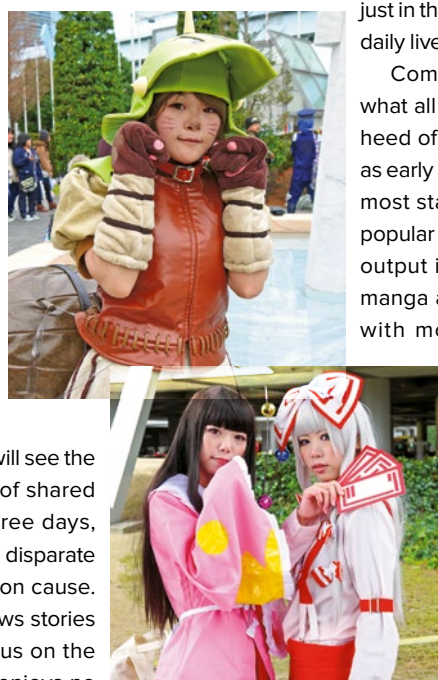
Comiket civilians wanting to see what all the fuss is about should take heed of the guides online, get in line as early as you dare, and be aware that most stalls change daily. That’s how popular a spot it is. While much of the output is amateur comics based on manga and anime properties—many with more adult themes than the

original inspiration—most of Japan’s subcultures are well-represented with, for example, military buffs seated next to train nerds. In recent years, craftsmen, amateur designers, and even amateur filmmakers have begun making the event their home, showing that there’s a whole lot

more to Comiket than just the comics. Braving the cold outside the main venue, you’ll find more cosplayers who may focus on riffing off of popular anime and manga, but with plenty of diversity and costumes ranging from robotic to historical recreations to the slightly intimidating military-minded.

The sheer numbers and variety are even more remarkable when considering that the people who make this event the institution it is are not getting paid directly. Furthermore, they might be sitting at the desk opposite you come the start of the new year ... though they might not admit to it.

www.comiket.co.jp



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📍 Roppongi (Exit 3)

🌐 <http://meturl.com/tipness>



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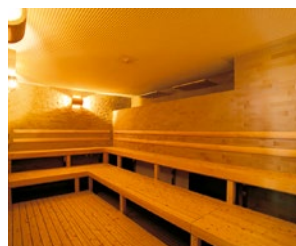
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MAGAGYM

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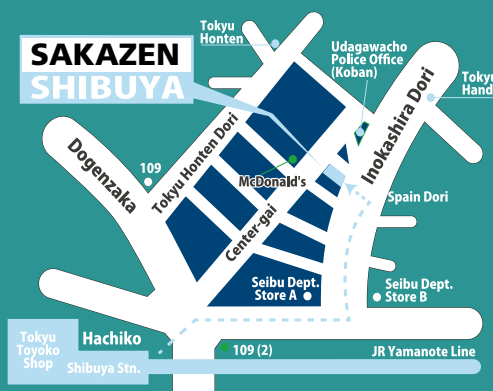
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
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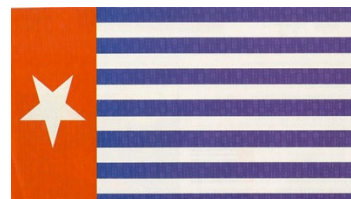


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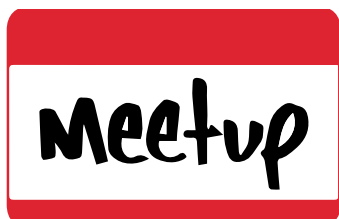
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GAIJIN WIFE, GAIJIN LIFE

BY GRACE BUCHELE MINETA



Grace Buchele Mineta is an author who blogs and draws comics about her daily life in Japan at www.HowIBecameTexan.com.

HOROSCOPE

BY CATHRYN MOE

♥ Love ♣ Money ♠ Luck

ARIES

Mar 21-Apr 20 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

January starts with relief that you made it through December. You have so much going for you, but a lot is behind you. This spells freedom in a way you never thought possible. The clarity of what you want is still a wee bit on hold. You're offered so much in such different worlds. Take your time and relax into what is truly most you. Lilith in your relationship sector makes sure there's not a dull moment!

TAURUS

Apr 21-May 21 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

Security is in view as January plays itself around you. The cloud cover lifts as you peek into your future. The weight of responsibility—or spreading yourself thin to handle it—has entered your geoeconomic sector. Simply put, the sunshine and money are there, but you'll be prioritizing this month to keep yourself anchored as you plan your next approach. Mars in your relationship sector is hot and sexy.

GEMINI

May 22-Jun 21 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

It's a busy month with family and friends, and not much time left over. That's just as well, with career matters sliding all around, and you in the midst of it all. If you indulge your mystical side, your artistic streak, or your love of film and music, you'll notice January becomes more of a comfort and less of a midwinter monster. You may not fly above every bump in the road, but someone may take this cozy journey with you.

CANCER

Jun 22-Jul 23 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

Feeling astrologically star-crossed? Do travel, work time, and expenses collide as you wonder what January is really meant to be? Mercury starts out retrograde early in the month, but resolves itself after three weeks, as will you. Answers are just questions turned upside down—you don't have to know any of them. Awareness comes as you experience your comfort levels to choose the next step in your path.

LEO

Jul 24-Aug 23 ♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

There's a teeny blip of connection and conversation in your world of relationships the first week of January. Then Mercury moves retrograde, and suddenly you're rehashing what you already waded through last year. Is this the way January has to be? Mercury moves direct on the third week, and whatever you've created becomes more real. Choose what brings joy—even if it's responsibility.

VIRGO

Aug 24-Sep 23 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

Is Jupiter going to be retrograde forever in Virgo? Is Mercury just having fun while you wonder what plans are going to stick? January can be your friend if you realize the canvas is being erased to make room for another painting. Take a picture with your mind's eye, then wait for the new paintbrushes and art box to arrive. The next step is going to be a leap. You will find it daring, exhilarating, and rewarding.

LIBRA

Sep 24-Oct 23 ♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

Something interesting this way comes. This is a month to remember; get a diary or Facebook it! January has surprise twists and turns. They're mostly about you getting it your way, after the karmic sludge of the past year pushed you through etheric treacle! Dark Moon Lilith goes over the halfway mark in your sign, so forget about Mercury being retrograde. You're meant to enjoy your own true expression!

SCORPIO

Oct 24-Nov 22 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

No need to see January as a door with creaky hinges that resists opening all the way. This month is your stellar moment, although it's hidden in shrouds of Mercury retrograde, and whispers of Dark Moon Lilith as she amps up your dreams. Translated, the new brigade is coming. If not amused, they'll lightsaber the shadows and make them stand accountable. Your only job is to integrate this accordingly!

SAGITTARIUS

Nov 23-Dec 22 ♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

If you're feeling a need to run and hide, be glad you're a Sagittarius. The Centaur can certainly make good time and distance, whether it's in the physical or emotional realms. Yes, it's January, and you may think you've had your fun, but with the Sun now in your income sector, the money finally arrives! Or at least, the sense of security you've needed. As Mercury goes direct, you'll be talking about it, too!

CAPRICORN

Dec 23-Jan 20 ♥♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

There are levels and layers to everything. Some are subtle realms; others are hard as rock. When you pick up on energetic waves, you know—but you may not know you know, unless your psychic support group is tuned in. January quickly steps forward, takes a few steps back (Mercury retrograde), then leaps forward the third week of the month. Happy birthday to Capricorns born in January!

AQUARIUS

Jan 21-Feb 19 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

You may have temporarily let go of your desire for something new, and considered going back to what's reliable. Of course, there's not much chance of that: we've entered a new Earth zone, and the paradigm is perilous—or is it? While Mercury retrograde does its thing, you can consider shaking off the January blues, filling each of your atoms with light. Happy birthday to Aquarians born in January!

PISCES

Feb 20-Mar 20 ♥♥♥ ♣♣♣♣

You're a leader. You know this, but you may wonder why it's not normally mentioned in astrology. You're a spiritual warrior, but you still have to deal with physical reality, even though it's usually slower to show up. January starts with a comfort zone that reverts to nostalgia, then brings you back again. What's this you have glimpsed? Your future self is pulling you through. The stars watch over you, too.



AS ANY FOREIGNER WORTH HIS SALT KNOWS, WE INEVITABLY GET AWAY WITH A LOT THAT THE JAPANESE DON'T."

the Japanese don't. Most expats have heard about, and likely orchestrated, the notorious "gaijin smash"—the act of a foreigner unknowingly or willfully breaking Japanese rules and conventions (of which there are many) with no real consequence. The fact that the rule-breaker is a gaijin usually trumps the rule-breaking act itself, because nobody can be bothered to argue with the hapless foreigner.

What's interesting is how a lot of us react to being treated differently, and how much we complain about it. "Nothing really happens to us, but the passive-aggressiveness is definitely there," goes the tired spiel. Funny that the white Westerners complaining about being marginalized are the same people who are idolized by the country's media. That doesn't mean Japan's treatment of foreigners is right, but it should be seen in context with the wider world. No one in Japan is being assaulted or killed by police for the color of their skin, for example.

Of course, that's not to ignore the difficulties that really do exist. It's not unheard of—even in 2015—for foreigners to be refused gym memberships, employment, and apartments because they are not Japanese. These are old problems with no real new solutions. It is hoped the Olympics will bring about change, but 2020 is still a long way off and there's a sense that these problems will sort themselves out.

Until then, and despite all the moaning, the gaijin's world is still a privileged one of free drinks, special treatment, and heightened romantic attention (or so I'm told—that one remains a myth to me). When positive discrimination lives next door to problematic prejudice, where does the road lead? And if expats could truly be treated the same as Japanese people, would they really want to be? The bright-eyed foreigner might enjoy acting like a dyed-in-the-wool Tokyoite when it suits, but take away his magic gaijin glow and watch the disappointment in his face when nobody mentions those excellent chopstick skills.

■ Ashley Clarke is a freelance writer from the U.K. and a recent addition to Tokyo's gaijin population.

THE FOREIGNER FLIPSIDE

Riding the ups and downs of the *gaijin* privilege paradox

BY ASHLEY CLARKE



Any foreigner who remembers their first time in Japan will remember it well. It's not so much that we have entered somewhere we are not welcome, but rather a sense of finding ourselves in a kind of futuristic fairyland. It seems overwhelmingly strange, yet somehow makes us feel that we're the strange ones. We suddenly realize that we look, speak, and smell differently from the majority, and for many, it's the first time in our lives that we have been made hyper-aware of our own foreignness.

It's natural to enjoy the attention at first—the Japanese are extremely welcoming to visitors in many cases, and Tokyo has no shortage of ex-

citable enthusiasts who want to be best friends with the foreigner. The big problem with this is that you start to question whether they would look twice at you otherwise. Insecurity takes over, and what at first seemed like innocent friendliness starts to grate. We sulk when shop assistants respond in English when we speak to them in Japanese. We glare back at the *obāsan* who gawks at us from under her hat as she cycles past in the sun. We raise our eyebrows at our Japanese colleagues who utter an over-the-top "jōzu!" ("You're so skilled!") whenever we manage to use chopsticks at dinner without poking our own eyes out ... which we want to do after hearing "jōzu!" for the 16th time. For better or worse, it's inescapable: we are outsiders, and our identities here are constructed as such.

But being different doesn't just give you license to whinge about how misunderstood you are; there are bonafide perks. I recently attended a music festival in Tokyo, and was initially thrilled to learn that foreign passport holders gained access for free. But as I stood in the relatively spacious "foreigners only" section beneath the front of the stage, mere meters away from Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, as hundreds of paying Japanese fans clamored against the barriers behind us, I started to feel like some kind of undeserving VIP imposter. Cue a lot of guilty gaijin dancing awkwardly to songs they didn't understand the lyrics to.

Free gig tickets and a fragile conscience aren't the only things you can cash in on for your gaijin sins. As any foreigner worth his salt knows, we inevitably get away with a lot that


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